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INFO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/THE WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [JA](#)
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ARTICLES:

(1) JCG-proposed six-nation drill to start later in month; First training joined by Japan, China, South Korea, Russia, US and Canada; Cooperation on the sea of sources of contention - Sea of Japan and East China Sea

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Top Play) (Almost full)
Evening, May 24, 2006

The Japan Coast Guard (JCG) and the maritime safety authorities of China, South Korea, Russia, the US and Canada have agreed to conduct drills before the end of this month aimed to prevent weapons of mass destruction from being transported into the East China Sea or the Sea of Japan. Bilateral drills for marine salvage and as a measure against smuggling have already been carried out with South Korea or Russia. However, this will be the first multinational drill involving major North Pacific coastal nations. Border-crossing cooperation will move into high gear in this oceanic area where sources of contention are rife, including over the Takeshima islets issue and the development of gas fields in the East China Sea.

Among similar drills is the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) against the use of weapons of mass destruction, which President Bush has proposed, following the 9-11 terrorist attacks on the US. However, since the PSI targets North Korea and some other countries, China and South Korea are not taking part in it.

The JCG has proposed the joint drill with the aim of securing the safety of maritime transportation route from the North Pacific to the Indian Ocean. Coordination to materialize multinational drills has been undertaken at the top-level meetings of the North

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Pacific maritime safety authorities, which has the six nations as members. The JCG's diplomatic effort has apparently come to fruition.

Major drills on the menu includes security drills to be carried out from May 27 or 28 through June 1 in the oceanic area from near Shanghai, China, to Vladivostok, Russia, and multi-purpose drills for maritime salvage and fire extinguishing to be carried out off Pusan, South Korea on June 7 and 8. Five countries, excluding Canada, are expected to dispatch a total of about 20 patrol ships to the areas.

In a simulation of a security drill, China will reject a US coast guard ship that is acting as a ship carrying weapons of mass destruction entering a Shanghai port and then track the ship fleeing in the direction of Russia. At the request of China, South Korea, Japan and Russia will pursue the ship fleeing on their exclusive economic zones (EEZ) in relays for five days. The JCG will also raid and search the ship.

The JCG mapped out this scenario. It charted a flight route along the median lines of the participating countries, taking into consideration the fact that the EEZs claimed by them are different. All participating countries agreed on the idea. Russia made the chart to be used by the six countries. Only two colors were used just to differentiate the sea from the land so that the chart will cause no territorial problem.

(2) Japanese, Chinese foreign ministers meet for first time in a year, look for ways to avoid causing more strains in bilateral relations, but gap left to be bridged

MAINICHI (Top play) (Full)
Evening, May 24, 2006

Takuji Nakata, Doha

Foreign Minister Taro Aso, now visiting Qatar, met with Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing at a hotel in Doha City late yesterday (early hours of today, Japan time). In the meeting, Li reiterated criticism of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine, describing them as "a political obstacle,"

and warned that a successor prime minister should not visit the shrine. On the other hand, the two foreign ministers agreed on the need for promoting cooperation and exchanges in such areas as the economy, culture, and security. By continuing and enhancing bilateral dialogues other than the one at the top level until Koizumi steps down this fall, the two countries now appear to have been able to stem bilateral relations from suffering any further strains.

The Japan-China foreign ministerial meeting took place for the first time in about one year and was the first one for Aso to attend since assuming the post of foreign minister.

Speaking of the so-called Yasukuni issue, Li criticized: "The fact that the Japanese leader pays homage at Yasukuni Shrine that enshrines Class-A war criminals along with other war dead hurts the sentiments of the Chinese people."

Aso told Li about Japan's position: "Visiting the shrine is to pay respect and offer gratitude to the war dead." As to whether he would visit the shrine, Aso said: "I'll make a proper decision

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based on my principles and in consideration of my official capacity."

On gas field development in the East China Sea, both foreign ministers confirmed that they would give a boost to senior working level talks. They also agreed that the two countries would discuss the introduction of a system of consultation and notification between relevant government agencies of the two countries, for instance, the Japan Coast Guard and the Chinese Navy. The purpose is to avoid unforeseen incidents at sea.

Aso stated, "We welcome a peaceful rise in China," but at the same time he expressed concerns about China's military buildup: "China needs to make its national defense policy transparent and to work for confidence building with Japan." Li emphasized: "As evidenced by the Great Wall of China, the purpose is for defense." The two foreign ministers agreed on a plan to resume security dialogues between the two countries - which have been interrupted since February 2004 - by the end of the year.

They also agreed to work together to bring about an early resumption of the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear issue. Aso sought cooperation from China to deal with the abduction issue, and in answering Aso's request, Li said, "We understand the importance of the issue."

After the meeting, Aso told the press: "We exchanged views frankly and effectively. I've felt that the meeting this time has now paved the path for Japan-China relations to move toward improvement."

Chief Cabinet Secretary Abe: "Extremely meaningful"

During a press conference this morning, Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe referred to the Japan-China foreign ministerial meeting held for the first time in one year and gave high marks to it: "It's extremely important to have talks with China at the foreign ministerial level. Such a meeting is extremely meaningful so as to frankly exchange views on issues lying between the two countries." When asked about the Chinese side's renewing its criticism of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine, Abe stressed: "In order to build a mature relationship, it is necessary for both of us to recognize and respect the other side's thinking and the differences. We must not close the door of dialogue."

(3) Whether important bills on conspiracy, national referendum, and education reform will clear Diet during current session remains uncertain

With less than one month left in the current Diet session that runs until June 18, the schedule of deliberations on important bills has become even tighter. The ruling coalition intends to give priority to deliberations on an administrative reform promotion bill, aiming at enacting it into law on May 26. It has postponed to next week or later a vote in the House of Representatives Committee on Judicial Affairs on a bill to amend the organized crime law that would make "conspiracy" a crime. Since no prospect is in sight for consultations with the opposition parties to modify the bill, whether the bill will

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clear the Diet during the current session is uncertain. It also will be difficult to pass a bill amending the Basic Education Law without extending the Diet session. The ruling camp is likely to be forced to walk a precarious tightrope in the weeks ahead.

In a press conference yesterday, Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe expressed his hope for an early vote on the bill to revise the organized crime law, saying, "Should the contents of the bill become well-known to the public, the mood for taking a vote will naturally heighten."

Unable to read the prime minister's mind

With Lower House Speaker Yohei Kono's arbitration on May 19, the ruling and opposition camps agreed to continue deliberations, but Yukio Hatoyama, secretary general of the largest opposition party, Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) asserted, "The ruling coalition should accept our bill with no changes." Koya Nishikawa of the LDP said, "We cannot make any more concessions."

A senior LDP Diet Affairs Committee member stated positively, "The bill will never clear the Diet without extending the session." If the Upper House requires as much time for deliberations as did the Lower House, it will be impossible to pass the bill before the end of the current session. The situation is that the ruling camp has yet to decide when to take a vote on the bill since it cannot read the real intentions of Prime Minister Koizumi, who has repeatedly made remarks that he is reluctant to extend the session. Some LDP members are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with Koizumi's response.

Deepening confrontation between LDP and Minshuto

Heightening confrontation between the LDP and Minshuto is affecting deliberations on a medical reform bill and other bills. The Upper House Committee on Health, Labor and Welfare launched deliberations yesterday, but Minshuto refused to attend the session. The members from the ruling parties and the Japanese Communist Party conducted deliberations. The ruling camp intends to continue deliberations without Minshuto lawmakers in an attempt to get the bill through the Diet before the end of the current session.

The Lower House Special Committee will start on the 24th deliberations on the bill revising the Basic Education Law with attendance of Koizumi. Minshuto submitted its own bill to the Lower House yesterday. The committee will conduct deliberations on both bills. Minshuto incorporates more conservative words than those of the government and ruling camp in its bill, aiming at rocking the LDP. The opposition party also intends to prevent the government-sponsored bill from clearing the Diet, calling for conducting deliberations thoroughly.

Many ruling camp members call for extension of the current Diet session

Asked by reporters about the government's bill yesterday, Koizumi responded, "If the deliberations are conducted thoroughly, the bill will pass through the Diet before the end of the current session." The dominant view in the ruling camp is that in order to pass the bill the session should be extended until the end of July. Negotiations broke down between the ruling camp and Minshuto on the joint submission of a bill on referendum for

amending the Constitution. The ruling LDP and its coalition partner, New Komeito intend to submit a bill to the current Diet session on their won as early as May 26. Minshuto also plans to present its own bill to the Diet. The prospects for the bills remain uncertain.

(4) Mapping out measures to cut government expenditures bound to encounter complications

MAINICHI (Page 3) (Full)
May 23, 2006

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Policy Research Council Chairman Nakagawa, who also serves as the chairman of the LDP's Spending Reform Project Team, presented in a speech on May 22 specific plans to cut civil servant employment costs, including a substantial cut in retirement benefits paid to local administrative chiefs and the abolition of subsidies paid from public funds to the mutual aid association for local public servants. Since public servants employment costs can be cut without cost to the Japanese people, as State Minister for Financial, Economic and Fiscal Policy Yosano put it, the more they are cut, the more people will appreciate it. Some are beginning to take the view that the settlement line for the package reform of expenditures and revenues is to have taxpayers tolerate a lenient cut in social security expenses in return for slashing public servants' salaries.

The Project Team has looked into ways to cut expenditures in five areas, including social security, public works, public servants and personnel costs since April. In particular, the panel has almost annually reformed the medical services and pension systems. Even so, spending in the two areas account for approximately 40% of general spending (20.5 trillion yen in fiscal 2006). Such spending is bound to continue to expand. In order to obtain understanding of the public for a hike in the consumption tax, the government has no other choice but to cut voluminous social security expenses. However, since a medical services reform bill is now under deliberation, it is difficult to discuss a cut in social security expenses, which will lead to a further increase in the burden shared by the public. Such being the circumstance, which items should be made subject to cuts have yet to be set.

The Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy (CEFP) has approved of a policy of constraining public works expenditures to an amount 3% below the preceding year's level over the next five years. However, the prevailing view in the LDP is that it is not possible to support a uniform cut. If the margin of a cut in social security expenditures is small, objections will likely come with people resenting the prospect that public works alone will become the victim of cost-cutting.

Though the LDP is determined to use a cut in public servants' salaries as an escape, the package reform of expenditures and revenues could disintegrate, if it fails to drastically cut social security expenses.

(5) FTC, prosecutors to toughen crackdowns on bid-rigging throughout nation, by fully imposing amended AML

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 3) (Slightly abridged)
May 24, 2006

The Osaka District Public Prosecutors Office Special Investigation Unit yesterday arrested seven company employees, including department heads, on suspicion of rigging bids on the construction of sewage-treatment plants. The incident has once again brought into the open the reality of a situation in which leading companies are rigging bids over large public works. Since the steel bridge bid-rigging case, in which the Fair Trade

Commission (FTC) filed an accusation last May, the FTC and public prosecutors have strengthened efforts to crack down on bid rigging. They are determined to root out the practice throughout the country by fully applying the revised Anti-Monopoly Law, which grants the FTC the authority to investigate AML violations.

The bridge construction bid-rigging case, which is reportedly the biggest bid-rigging case in history, revealed that sales personnel of Japan's leading companies, including Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and Ishikawajima-Harima Heavy Industries, were involved in bureaucrat-led bid rigging in conspiracy with senior officials of the former Japan Highway Public Corporation, the sponsor of the projects. The number of manufacturers indicted on charges of violating the AML reached 26.

Of the 11 companies charged with bid rigging over the construction of sewage-treatment plants, five are on trial for engaging in bid rigging for the construction of steel bridges. Some of these companies had also come under scrutiny on suspicion of engaging in bid rigging over the construction of water gates and tunnel ventilation equipment. The FTC conducted on-the-spot inspections of these bid-rigging cases. The FTC and public prosecutors have made clear their determination to urge companies to observe regulations more strictly, as a senior public prosecutor of the Supreme Public Prosecutors' Office put it.

In bid-rigging cases concerning projects sponsored by the New Tokyo International Airport Authority (now Narita International Airport) and the Defense Facilities Administration Agency, the FTC and public prosecutors brought employees in charge at heavy electric machinery and air conditioner makers and general contractors in a summary indictment on charges of conducting collusive tendering. The case has revealed that bid rigging is rampant in every sector.

The FTC and public prosecutors will toughen their efforts to crack down on bid rigging, based on the revised AML, which went into effect this January. The revised law grants the FTC investigative authority, which enables it to search companies involved in rigged bidding and seize evidence. A system of reducing administrative surcharges imposed on companies that cooperate with the FTC by voluntarily reporting unfair trade practices has also been introduced. Before the law was revised, only the Tokyo High Public Prosecutors Office was authorized to indict AML offenders, but now any district public prosecutors office can do so.

Bid rigging over the construction of sewage-treatment plants is the first case in which the FTC has exercised its authority to investigate AML violations. The Osaka District Public Prosecutors Office will be in charge of investigation. The case reportedly involved monetary compensation to contain oppositions to the construction of such facilities. On May 17, the special investigation unit arrested one broker, who acted as a mediator, on suspicion of blackmail. This broker (72), an executive of a

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consulting company, allegedly extorted approximately 16 million yen from companies that were involved in the bid rigging. He was active mainly in western Japan. He reportedly has influence on both manufacturers and local governments. The Special Investigation Unit is keen to discern the flow of funds from the involved companies. It is expected to pursue this executive as well as the arrested seven employees.

(6) 2006 LDP presidential race (Part 1): One-on-one battle between Fukuda and Abe expected

SANKEI (Page 4) (Abridged slightly)
May 24, 2006

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, 64, has rejected the idea of making factional coordination for the Liberal Democratic Party's presidential election, which is only four months away. Former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, 68, who heads the largest faction in the LDP with two potential successors to Koizumi -- Chief Cabinet

Secretary Shinzo Abe, 51, and former Chief Cabinet Secretary

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Yasuo Fukuda, 69 -- has also revealed his intention to give up fielding a single candidate. Although there is an observation that candidates have effectively been narrowed down to Abe and Fukuda, Foreign Minister Taro Aso, 65, and Finance Minister Sadakazu Tanigaki, 61, are determined to turn the tables. This is the first installment in a series of reports on the LDP presidential race in motion.

Abe called on Mori at his office near the Diet building on the afternoon of May 17. Mori moaned to Abe about loud support for Abe by Ichita Yamamoto, 48, a junior member of the Mori faction.

Mori's true intention was to determine Abe's preparedness to run in the race. Abe gave an evasive answer to Mori's question. Abe is also believed to have explained his position that not running in the race would disappoint the expectations of his supporters.

Mori still holds a faint hope for fielding a single candidate. Abe and Fukuda are often compared in terms of Asia policy and a generational change. Despite Mori's hope for a compromise between the two, speculation is growing that Abe and Fukuda will face off in the LDP poll.

When Mori met on May 22 with former Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, who was also scheduled to hold talks with Abe and Fukuda, Mori asked for Lee's ratings on the two.

After the Golden Week holiday period, Fukuda made a weeklong visit to the United States where he was able to hold talks with some 50 prominent figures, including Vice President Dick Cheney -- red-carpet treatment to someone not holding any key government or party post. The visit proved fruitful for Fukuda, who aimed at exchanging views on America's Asia strategy and other matters. People connected with the US Congress wanted to know if Fukuda would run for the LDP presidency.

But Fukuda always told them: "I didn't say anything about seeking the presidency. The media made that up."

A Mori faction member supportive of Fukuda took this view: "Mr. Fukuda's US trip was a success. The White House has high regards for him, and that's why he was able to accomplish more than just seeing US congressional members."

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Washington's red-carpet treatment is not completely unconnected with Fukuda's growing popularity. In the latest opinion survey conducted by Fuji-TV's "Hodo 2001," the support rate for Abe marked 36.2% and that for Fukuda 29.2%, with the difference shrinking by 28 points to 7 points from January.

The trend is ascribable to the emergence of a mood putting higher priority to experience than to youthfulness with the appearance of Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) President Ichiro Ozawa, 64, and Fukuda's diplomatic stance attaching importance to China. A growing likelihood for Fukuda's one-on-one battle with Abe following Mori's announcement to give up a single candidate is another reason.

Fukuda does not seem eager to run in the race, at least on the surface. His father, former Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda, launched the Mori faction (or Seiwa Seisaku Kenkyukai). Fukuda wants to ride the crest of growing calls for his candidacy rather than to come forward independently and split up the faction. Such scenario is being mentioned in the LDP.

Before leaving for the United States, Fukuda and his wife visited the home in Tokyo of the late Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi to offer incense sticks ahead of the seventh anniversary of his death. The Obuchi family sensed Fukuda's eagerness for the LDP's top job.

Abe calmly attributed Fukuda's growing popularity to his track records, including his service as chief cabinet secretary in the Koizumi administration. But a junior member close to Abe thinks he is alarmed by Fukuda's popularity.

Fukuda served as chief cabinet secretary and Abe as his deputy for three years from the closing days of the Mori administration to the beginning of the Koizumi administration. Reportedly discord grew stronger between the two during that period.

Fukuda and Abe again locked horns fiercely over whether Koizumi should visit Pyongyang to collect family members of repatriated abductees following his first surprise visit to North Korea in 2002. Since Fukuda became the Mori faction's representative secretary general in the fall of 2004, Abe has rarely attended

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the faction's general meetings.

Being the Koizumi cabinet's spokesman, it has been difficult for Abe to comment on the LDP poll. But he has begun mentioning correcting the social disparity and relations with China apparently with the LDP presidency in mind. A Mori faction member supporting Abe noted: "Only a few faction members, including Mr. Seishiro Eto, 65, have made it clear that they would throw support behind Mr. Fukuda. I think that of the 87 members, 80% are supporting Mr. Abe and 20% Mr. Fukuda."

Views of members of other factions are mixed. Mid-level and veteran members pinning hopes on Fukuda and who are also eager to become winners in the next administration are carefully monitoring the trend without expressing their support for Fukuda outright.

Rumor has it that a fifth person will join the race along with Abe, Fukuda, Aso, and Tanigaki. Aso and former Secretary General Koichi Kato, 66, also pointed to the possibility of another

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candidate.

Such persons as former Vice President Taku Yamasaki, 69, State Minister in Charge of Economic and Fiscal Policy Kaoru Yosano, 67, and Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Toshihiro Nikai, 67, are being mentioned as possible candidates.

An LDP executive predicted: "A large number of candidates would reduce Abe's chances for winning a majority, resulting in a runoff." A veteran Fukuda supporter took this view: "If a runoff occurred between the top two contenders, many would vote for Fukuda to score a come-from-behind victory."

It has been a half-century since Abe's grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi, won most but failed to win a majority in the first voting and was eventually defeated by his runner-up, Tanzan Ishibashi, who joined hands in the second ballot with the person who came in third in the first voting in the election in 1956. Will Abe be able to achieve a victory in the first ballot?

(7) Editorial: Full preparations necessary for SDF to withdraw from Samawah safely

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)
May 24, 2006

Following the inauguration of the formal Iraqi government, the focus of attention has now shifted to when and how coalition forces will withdraw from Iraq after security responsibilities are handed over to the Iraqi government.

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki met with visiting British Prime Minister Blair and said that the security responsibility in Samawah, in which Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) troops have been stationed, would be transferred from the British and Australian militaries to Iraqi security forces in June, at the earliest.

If matters move smoothly, as envisioned by Iraq's prime minister, Japan will be able to pull GSDF troops out of Iraq possibly in July, together with British and Australian troops.

About 500 troops in 10th SDF rotation are about to enter Samawah. Should the government formally decide to withdraw troops in the near future, they will be the last troops stationed in Samawah.

In its basic plan for SDF dispatch to Iraq - adopted at a cabinet meeting last December, the government set these conditions for withdrawing SDF troops: (1) progress in the political process, such as holding of national assembly elections and establishing a full-scale government; (2) the local security situation; and (3) the state of activities by coalition forces, including British and Australian troops, and changes in the composition of the forces.

The new Iraqi government was finally launched nearly six months later than scheduled, and the new prime minister referred to handing over security responsibilities in Samawah to Iraqi security forces. This means that GSDF troops in Samawah will soon start a process leading to their withdrawal.

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, however, has yet to specify when Japan will bring its troops back to Japan, only saying: "We

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will make a judgment from a comprehensive viewpoint." Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe has also cautiously taken the remarks by the new Iraqi prime minister, commenting: "No one can predict what would happen in the future."

The government is nervous about SDF withdrawal, because risk may be involved, for instance, an attack by armed insurgents. Dutch troops were attacked on their way from Samawah.

Samawah is one of the most stable areas in Iraq, but in many other areas in Iraq, attacks by terrorists or insurgents have often taken place. There was a case in which a shell was fired at the SDF camp. They must stay alert.

GSDF troops employ many local citizens for work to repair roads and public facilities. There is a project that involves employing 1,000 local residents a day. Local residents will be unable to get jobs should SDF troops be pulled out. It therefore is necessary for Japan to work out some measures so that local residents will not be left dissatisfied and disgusted.

Japan also must let local residents know that it will continue to make utmost efforts to reconstruct their nation by constructing thermal power plants and other projects under its official development assistance (ODA) program even after pulling out SDF troops.

Japan plans to have SDF troops leave Iraq in conjunction with the withdrawal of British and Australian troops because the Japanese troops have been under their protection. The Japanese military should make full arrangements with the British and Australian militaries.

The government has decided to continue offering airlift services by the Air Self-Defense Force even after GSDF troops return home. Such airlift services will naturally be carried out under the context of humanitarian and rehabilitation assistance based on the Iraq Humanitarian Reconstruction Support Special Measures Law.

Two years and three months have already passed since the GSDF launched humanitarian and reconstruction assistance in Samawah. During this period, it was lucky that no incident has befallen the Japanese troops.

In order to pull the GSDF out of Iraq safely, Japan must prepare a perfect crisis-management system.

(8) Why the Foreign Ministry is all upset about Muneo Suzuki's visit to the northern territories after five years

SHUKAN POSUTO (Weekly Post) (Pages 172-173) (Abridged)
June 2, 2006

Lawmaker Muneo Suzuki visited Japan's northern territories (now controlled by Russia) for the first time in five years for four days starting on May 19. He joined a group of visitors to the islands participating in a no-visa exchange that just started this fiscal year (April 1). The Foreign Ministry was greatly upset to find out about his trip. A staffer at that ministry explains why:

"The no-visa exchange visitors will be accompanied by somebody

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from the Foreign Ministry. When we found out that Mr. Suzuki would be in the group, all of the Russia Division staff responsible for the exchange said they did not want to go on the trip. They expected Mr. Suzuki would bombard them during the tour with questions, and that afterward, he would report their every move to their boss. He would add a big load to their work. Moreover, if they responded poorly to his demands, it would lead to more criticism of the Foreign Ministry."

The reason why ministry officials are so nervous is because Suzuki has continuously been pursuing the Foreign Ministry in the Diet. After he was restored to political life in the last election, Muneo has already sent 183 sets of questions to the Ministry for it to answer in the Diet. Among them was an inquiry about suspicions of secret funds being held by the Japanese Embassy in Moscow during the former Soviet Union period. He pursued that issue last November in the Diet, but the official that he had named, Russia Division Director Kuninori Matsuda did not show up.

The same Foreign Ministry source said:

"At that time, Director Matsuda was criticized for ducking his responsibility, but this time, most of the Russia Division staff were backbiting him, saying that it would be better if the division director accompany Suzuki since there were still sore feelings left from that incident. There have been some who ridiculed Director Matsuda, saying that since he had been exposed by Suzuki for acting childish at a posh Japanese restaurant, he now had the chance to complain directly to him."

Muneo Suzuki was arrested on the charge of bribery and corruption in 2002, but what set off the scandal was the issue of a (foreign aid-funded) friendship house built on the northern island of Kunashiri. At the time, a Japanese Communist Party lawmaker noted that the place was called the "Muneo House," and this sparked suspicions about Suzuki. A reporter attached to the Foreign Ministry noted:

"In the end, Director Matsuda again ducked responsibility and sent an underling to accompany the group. Although the staffers of the Russia Division so far have been avoiding Suzuki, even absenting themselves from a reception held by the Russian ambassador, they cannot escape him now due to the no-visa exchange trip."

In addition, what also has the Foreign Ministry bustling about has been the Cabinet Office's action. A source in the Foreign Ministry had these misgivings:

"It was the Cabinet Office that gave permission to Suzuki at the last minute to join the no-visa exchange group. In dealing with the northern territories issue, the Foreign Ministry has handled the diplomatic negotiations, and the Cabinet Office has been in charge of the northern island reversion movement in Japan, which includes handling the petitions of former islanders. But since the negotiations to return the islands have been stagnant, the Cabinet Office is said to be annoyed at the Foreign Ministry. If Suzuki visits the islands, his row with the Foreign Ministry will

become self-evident. The Cabinet Office's aim seems to have been to further stir up the quarrel between the Ministry and Suzuki, and thereby grab for itself the lead on northern territorial affairs."

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SCHIEFFER